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—1987 Annual Report of the— Missouri State Park Advisory Board

1987 Annual Report of the Missouri State Park Advisory Board

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Missouri Department of Natural Resources
Division of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation

JOHN ASHCROFT
Governor

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Division of Energy
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Division of Management Services
Division of Parks, Recreation,
and Historic Preservation

STATE OF MISSOURI
DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

DIVISION OF PARKS, RECREATION, AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

P.O. Box 176
Jefferson City, MO 65102
314-751-2479

June 9, 1988

The Honorable John Ashcroft
Governor of Missouri
State Capitol
Jefferson City, MO 65101

Dear Governor Ashcroft:

I am pleased to transmit to you the 1987 Annual Report of the Missouri State Park Advisory Board. This report, prepared pursuant to Executive Order 86-26, summarizes the major accomplishments which occurred in the Missouri State Park System during the past year and recommends future actions which should be taken.

Because of the availability of the revenues from the Parks and Soils Sales Tax approved by the voters in 1984, many significant improvements have occurred both in the condition of park facilities and the quality of service provided to the public. Campgrounds have been renovated, historic buildings restored, and exhibits have been constructed to interpret the unique natural and cultural resources preserved in our state park system.

While much has been accomplished, much remains to be done. With the Parks and Soils Sales Tax expiring in 1989, the Board is extremely concerned about future financing for state parks. We firmly believe that the public supports the current sales tax and if given the opportunity, will endorse its renewal. The Missouri State Park Advisory Board stands ready to assist you in providing a first-class state park system for the citizens of our state.

Sincerely,

MISSOURI STATE PARK ADVISORY BOARD

James L. Wilson
Chairman

Enclosure

cc: Members, General Assembly

Missouri State Park Advisory Board
Annual Report

The Missouri state park system, which today includes more than 100,000 acres, had its beginnings in the early 1900s. In 1917, the Missouri legislature passed a law establishing a state park fund, using revenue from the fish and game department. Not until 1924, however, did Missouri acquire its first park, which was Big Spring State Park near Van Buren.

The 1930s were a significant period of growth in the new system. Through the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) program, thousands of workers, left unemployed by the Depression, built a variety of park facilities, from dining lodges and picnic shelters to cabins and campgrounds. Much of their handiwork still can be seen in the parks today.

In 1936, the management of state parks was separated from the state fish and game department and was placed under the supervision of a new Missouri State Park Board. This was done so that a new source of revenue could be found for the system, and to clarify and separate the operation of state parks from the management of Missouri's fish, forests, and wildlife.

The expanding park system soon was faced with a critical shortage of funds. To address this need, drafters of the 1945 state constitution included a provision establishing a mill tax, earmarking a portion for state parks. In 1960, Missouri voters extended this constitutional provision by a two-to-one majority during a special vote on the mill tax. This special tax for state parks was in effect for 27 years and expired in 1972.

In 1974, with the reorganization of nearly all of state government, the Missouri Department of Natural Resources was created and assumed responsibility for administering the state park system.

During the 1970s, the system was financed by general revenue appropriations and by federal funds such as the Land and Water Conservation Fund. In the early 1980s, the state's economy declined, and many federal funds were greatly reduced as well. State parks again faced economic hardship.

In 1982, Missouri voters approved a \$600 million statewide bond issue that included \$55 million for major renovation and construction projects in state parks.

In 1984, Missouri voters again showed their support by approving a one-tenth-of-one-percent sales tax for state parks and soil- and water-conservation efforts. This tax took effect in July 1985 and will be collected until September 1989.

Throughout its history, the state park system has continued to grow, although funding sources and amounts have changed. But the system's mission—which was first established in its early days—has remained constant: to preserve and interpret the state's most outstanding natural and cultural resources and to provide recreational opportunities.

OVERVIEW OF 1987

In many ways, 1987 was a record year for the Missouri state park system. Excitement was building as new funds provided a way to upgrade the facilities, and more seasonal employees helped improve maintenance, increase safety, and present more interpretive programs. Visitors also caught the excitement and turned out in record numbers—more than 12.9 million. This is an seven-percent increase over attendance in 1986 and continues a trend of increased attendance over the past several years.

The number of camping permits sold stayed approximately the same—more than 262,000. These figures, however, are influenced by the fact that portions of many of the system's campgrounds were closed for renovation and improvement during much of the regular camping season.

The number of cabin and motel reservations increased by five percent—from 33,674 in 1986 to 35,517 in 1987.

Gross revenues generated by the park system came to \$7.6 million in 1987. This figure includes revenue from camping fees, historic site tours, and such concession-operated businesses as dining lodges and motels. Of the total revenue generated, the department's share was \$2.6 million. These monies are returned to the park system and are used to operate and maintain all state park facilities. This economic activity greatly contributed to the state's tourism industry, which is the second-largest industry in the state. In many parts of Missouri, the presence of a state park is a significant benefit to the economy of nearby communities.

Participation in the campground-reservation system almost doubled during 1987. The program began in 1986 with six parks and in 1987 expanded to ten parks. More than 2,970 people took advantage of the reservation system in 1987, compared to 1,500 people in 1986.

More people also volunteered to help in state parks in 1987. The Volunteers in Parks (VIP) program offers people a chance to work in state parks or historic sites as campground hosts, interpreters, park aides, or trail workers. In 1987, 124 individuals volunteered their time. Sixty-nine of these served as campground hosts--more than twice the number who volunteered in 1986. Forty-six people volunteered as park aides, and the rest worked as interpreters or trail workers.

The state park system increased in size by almost 1,860 acres, to a total of 106,715. The majority of the lands purchased were additions to existing sites or areas already surrounded by park land. The board believes the continued acquisition of selected private lands adjacent to existing parks is critical in order to protect park resources and improve park management.

A major portion of the new acreage included a new lease agreement with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to add more than 1,200 acres to Long Branch State Park. Also included was the purchase of Fort Davidson State Historic Site, a 15-acre tract of land previously leased from the U.S. Forest Service.

Improvements in the State Park System

Visitors to state parks and historic sites in 1987 saw a tremendous amount of activity as the department set about repairing and upgrading the state park system. The renaissance of the system was the result of funding from the statewide bond issue and the parks-and-soils sales tax.

Although the bond issue was approved in 1982, the department received the largest amount—approximately \$39 million—in fiscal year 1986. This meant that many of the capital-improvement projects financed by the bond issue were under way in the summer of 1987.

The sales tax has been in effect since July 1985 (fiscal year 1986). Many of the projects that had been in the planning stages became realities this year, however, so the public saw many more improvements than ever before.

The emphasis for the funds has been to repair, maintain, and upgrade existing facilities and programs. While the bond issue has been used for many capital-improvement projects, the sales tax has been used for operations as well as capital improvements. A breakdown of the appropriations for the sales tax funding follows:

Sales Tax Appropriations

	Approp. FY 86	Approp. FY 87	Approp. FY 88	Total
Operations	\$7,241,132	7,740,950	7,640,912	22,622,994
Capital Improvements	\$8,633,663	8,615,900	9,389,580	26,639,143
Total	\$15,874,795	16,356,850	17,030,492	49,262,137

Sales Tax Operations Budget

In FY 86, FY 87, and FY 88, approximately \$22.6 million was appropriated for the operations budget. Examples of the ways these funds were used follow:

- Approximately \$1.3 million was appropriated for 85 new permanent employees. An additional \$1.1 million was appropriated for approximately 400 new seasonal employees. These included maintenance workers, naturalists, tour guides, and rangers.

- Approximately \$1.7 million was made available for replacing worn-out cars and trucks.

- Approximately \$3 million was appropriated for non-vehicular equipment such as heating and cooling equipment, cabin furniture and appliances, and lawn mowers.

- Approximately \$.8 million was appropriated for heavy construction equipment such as bulldozers and graders.

- Approximately \$1.9 million was appropriated for new equipment such as radio communications equipment and new tractors.

- Approximately \$1.5 million was appropriated for landscaping in picnic areas, campgrounds, and trails.

Sales Tax Capital-improvements Budget

With an appropriation of more than \$26 million for the three fiscal years, much of the money from the capital-improvement budget was used for renovating campgrounds; repairing facilities such as dining lodges, cabins, and historic structures; repairing and paving roads; and building new facilities such as restrooms, picnic shelters, cabins, and visitor centers.

- In FY 86, almost \$5.3 million was appropriated for 65 projects involving new construction and renovation. Almost \$3 million was appropriated for 48 maintenance and repair projects.

- In FY 87, almost \$7 million was appropriated for 79 new construction and renovation projects. Almost \$2 million was appropriated for 17 maintenance and repair projects.

- In FY 88, more than \$7 million was appropriated for 67 construction and renovation projects. Almost \$2.4 million was appropriated for 20 maintenance and repair projects.

Accomplishments during 1987

--Grand Gulf State Park, which contains one of Missouri's most significant geologic areas, was dedicated. The 159-acre park was acquired through a lease agreement with the L-A-D Foundation of St. Louis.

--Many campgrounds were renovated and improved, including those at Bennett Spring, Lake of the Ozarks, Roaring River, Washington, St. Francois, Pomme de Terre, Lake Wappapello, Wallace, Harry S Truman, Table Rock, Crowder, Knob Noster, Graham Cave, and Trail of Tears state parks.

--Group camps were repaired and renovated, including those at Lake of the Ozarks, Cuivre River, Roaring River, Dr. Edmund A. Babler Memorial, and Knob Noster state parks.

--Historic structures were repaired and restored, including the Old Tavern at Arrow Rock State Historic Site, the Anderson House at Battle of Lexington State Historic Site, the Pommer-Gentner and Strehly houses at Deutschheim State Historic Site, and Union Covered Bridge State Historic Site.

--Facilities were repaired and renovated, including the restaurant at Big Lake State Park, and dining lodges at Roaring River and Meramec state parks.

--New facilities were constructed, including new cabins at Thousand Hills, Big Lake, and Bennett Spring state parks, and a new swimming pool at Roaring River State Park.

--The visitor center at Ozark Caverns in Lake of the Ozarks State Park was dedicated, and a ground-breaking ceremony was held for the visitor center at Prairie State Park.

--Work was completed on visitor centers at Trail of Tears, Mastodon, and Van Meter state parks. The contract was awarded for construction of the visitor center at Dr. Edmund A. Babler Memorial State Park.

--Development continued toward the opening of new units, including Weston Bend and Robertsville state parks, and Osage Village, Missouri Mines, and Scott Joplin House state historic sites.

Other Issues in 1987

The Missouri River State Trail

A proposal to convert the 200-mile-long corridor of the abandoned Missouri-Kansas-Texas Railroad into a hiking and biking trail advanced. The state legislature appropriated \$228,000 for an operations budget for the proposed trail. The budget allowed the department to hire personnel and buy equipment for the purpose of securing, protecting, and preserving the railroad corridor.

Two sections of the corridor--35 miles from Jefferson City to Rocheport and 46 miles from Rocheport to Sedalia--were transferred to the department. The department has established a daily patrol on these sections. The department also acquired the depots at North Jefferson City, Boonville, and Sedalia.

Deer Study and Hunts

After an extensive six-month study, the department conducted special hunts to reduce deer populations in three state parks: Thousand Hills, Pershing, and Knob Noster. The study, which determined deer populations and how they affect park resources, showed that there was a problem in the three parks.

The special hunts were conducted in November during the regular statewide firearms season. A total of 300 deer were taken at the three parks.

The study of how deer populations affect the parks will continue. The study is being conducted during the winter of 1987-88 in the three parks that were hunted, as well as Meramec, Harry S Truman, and Cuivre River state parks. The decision to conduct additional hunts will be made on a yearly basis after the research data are evaluated.

PARVS Survey

According to a Public Area Recreation Visitors Survey (PARVS), state parks and historic sites are visited by more people from urban than from rural areas. This was just one of the results from a major study of park visitors completed in 1987.

The department participated in the nationwide PARVS survey, which is conducted through the U.S. Forest Service and is designed to provide information about state park visitors. The report showed that 75.7 percent of visitors to state parks come from within Missouri, while 24.3 percent are from out of state. Of the visitors from Missouri, approximately 60 percent are from metropolitan areas and 40 percent from rural areas. The St. Louis metropolitan area contributes the most visitors, followed by Kansas City, Columbia, Springfield, St. Joseph, and Joplin.

The department also will be able to calculate more information about state park visitors, including their age, income, race, education, employment, preferences in recreation activities, reasons for visiting the sites, willingness to pay a fee and the maximum amount they would pay, average trip expenditure, visitation frequency, and group size.

New Alcoholic Beverage Regulation

In order to improve public safety and visitor enjoyment, the department began limiting the consumption of alcoholic beverages to certain areas in state parks. Alcohol consumption is no longer allowed on parking lots, swimming beaches, and off-road-vehicle areas; alcoholic beverages still are permitted in campgrounds and picnic areas.

New Road Signs

A new agreement with the Missouri Highway and Transportation Department is improving the number, location, and distinctiveness of highway signs leading to state parks and historic sites. New signs are being placed along the interstates, state highways, and county roads, and at other strategic junctions. The new signs also will have a new look: white letters on a brown background and a trapezoidal shape that suggests the direction of travel. These signs will help visitors locate state parks and also will promote tourism.

Gans Creek Study

A \$25,000 gift from the Williams Pipeline Co. allowed the department to study the impacts of an ammonia nitrate spill in Gans Creek, which runs through Rock Bridge Memorial State Park near Columbia. The study will be completed in 1988.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Although many improvements occurred in the state park system in 1987, we also must look to the future to protect these valuable resources. One way this is being done is through a state park plan, which will compare what already exists in the system and what should be included in the future. In keeping with the overall state park mission, the plan should address potential natural and cultural resources and possible recreational opportunities. The plan will be completed in 1988 and will be re-evaluated periodically.

The department also is looking at possible threats to the present quality of state park and historic site resources. These include aesthetic degradation, air and water pollution, archaeological theft, poaching, exotic-species encroachment, urbanization, loss of species diversity, overuse, and reduced funding. A state parks study is needed to identify these threats and to recommend actions needed to minimize them.

The most important challenge the state park system faces in the future is the need for a source of stable funding. The last appropriation of funds from the statewide bond issue was in 1986, and the parks-and-soils sales tax will expire in 1989.

Without its own funding source, the park system would again have to rely upon general-revenue appropriations from the legislature. With the present state of the economy and increased competition for funding, it is unrealistic to assume that the legislature could keep state park funding at its present level through general revenue alone.

If the tax is allowed to expire, the department would not be able to maintain the quality of the park system. The public would see a major decline in the system, not only in the maintenance of facilities, but in such services as programs, tours, maintenance, and law enforcement. The department would have to consider ways to produce more revenue, such as entrance fees. But even this money would fall far short of funding the park system at its present level.

The only viable solution is an extension of the parks-and-soils sales tax. The board supports the proposal to keep the sales tax at one-tenth of one percent and divide it three ways: 45 percent for state parks; 45 percent for soil-erosion control efforts; and 10 percent for local parks. This three-way split will allow the department to maintain its present quality while also addressing the needs of local parks.

The board does not believe that a tax increase would be approved by the voters; also, a further reduction of the department's share would not allow the department to maintain the present quality of state parks and soil-conservation efforts.

With a stable funding source, the department could maintain the state park system, develop unopened sites, and continue to provide a quality service to all Missourians.

